

CHAPTER

CASE STUDY

13

MOTIVATION AND EMOTION

What motivates people to join a group activity or to help a person in need, especially when the group or person in need is unfamiliar to them, is a subject of much psychological study. Some theorists feel that motivation in both instances can be explained by norms, or standards for behavior. In other words, people act the way they do because society has created standards of behavior, which they are motivated to follow. In their book *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?*, Bibb Latané and Jon Darley document a series of experiments they conducted to identify factors that influence people's decisions to participate or not. The excerpt that follows recounts one of those experiments.

To Frisbee or Not To Frisbee

You are probably familiar with the Frisbee, or pluto platter, that appears in the spring. It is a circular, pie plate-like disc which, when propelled by a expert, can be made to fly or float through the air in complex and graceful arcs. The amount of time college students take off from more scholarly activities to devote to the study of Frisbees suggests that the activity is pleasurable and even fascinating. In a study conducted in a senior social psychology seminar at New York University, Sheri Turteltaub and Harriet Ortman cleverly capitalized on this fascination to study the promotion of interaction among groups of strangers. They were concerned with factors promoting interaction among previously nonorganized groups in public places. Most specifically, their task was to turn the Grand Central Station waiting room into a frenzy of flying Frisbees.

A girl sat on a bench in the waiting room at Grand Central. Soon another girl sat on a bench facing her. They recognized each other and began a conversation. One girl had been shopping and announced that she had just bought a Frisbee. The other girl asked to see it and the first girl threw it to her. They then began to toss it back and forth. Apparently by accident, the Frisbee was thrown to a third person and the reaction of this third person (an experimental confederate), was the independent variable of the study. That person either enthusiastically joined in throwing the Frisbee or accused the two girls of being childish and dangerous, and kicked the Frisbee back across the gap.

Whichever of these two variations occurred, the two girls continued throwing the Frisbee back and forth and eventually threw it to one of the real bystanders seated on the benches. They continued this until all the bystanders on the two facing benches had been tried. A bystander was counted as participating in the activity if he returned the Frisbee at least twice. The percentage of bystanders who joined in the Frisbee fest was the dependent measure of the study.

When the experimental confederate joined in the play, the other spectators were extremely likely to do so also. The average percentage of participation over four cases was 86 percent and people often came from other areas of the waiting room to participate. Indeed in this condition the problem was not to start interaction but to terminate it, so the experimenters could leave for the next waiting room and run further tests.

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What were the conclusions of study/article?
Respond to "What Motivates in the Workplace" question below
* Notes here:

► CHAPTER 13, continued

On the other hand, if the confederate refused to play and instead disapproved of the girls' activity, no other bystander ever joined in the action. Instead, people sitting nearby would frequently get up and move to other seats to avoid being thrown a Frisbee, muttering their disapproval while doing so.

The girls went on to run further tests in an attempt to determine which features of the confederate's behavior were critical. In one condition, the confederate returned the Frisbee to the two girls without commenting or otherwise joining in the action. A high percentage, 74 percent, of bystanders participated, not significantly different from the positive participation condition. In another condition, the confederate did not join in the action but allowed the Frisbee to bounce off her accidentally and be retrieved by one of the two original girls. Under these circumstances, too, other bystanders participated at a high rate. The confederate who was a model for inaction failed to inhibit participation by other bystanders.

These results suggest that what the confederate did was less important than what the confederate said. Interaction was significantly inhibited only when the confederate loudly denounced the Frisbee throwers. The results also suggest a normative analysis. When certain norms are made salient, they inhibit action. The experimenters ran other tests to distinguish exactly which norms were operative in the situation. In these further conditions, the confederate carefully confined her negative comments to an appeal to one norm. In one situation, she cited the danger to others that was caused by throwing the Frisbee and in another she accused the participants of indulging in childish behavior.

Both types of sanctions inhibited action about equally. The overall percentage of participation was about 27 percent. However, the girls did a final manipulation which calls a norm-centered account into question: either the confederate stayed to watch the Frisbee players after she gave her sanctions or she immediately left the waiting room. When the confederate stayed, play was greatly inhibited. When she left, the percentage of bystanders participating rose to near its original rate. The sanctioning speech by itself did not inhibit play; it required the sanctioned speech *plus* the confederate's continued presence.

It might be argued that the continued presence of the sanctioning individual made the norm that she had evoked more salient and thus more inhibitory. This, we think, stretches the meaning of the word salience. Even when the denouncer left, she did so only after upbraiding the Frisbee players. Obviously the norms she cited were salient to bystanders, in that they were forcefully brought to their attention. However, the bystanders still participated. Our explanation of the result ignores norms. It seems reasonable that the bystanders simply considered the costs of participating. When the spoilsport confederate stayed around, it was possible that she might yell at other bystanders who participated, call the police, or otherwise punish or embarrass the participants.

QUESTIONS

1. What factors other than norms might have motivated a particular person to either participate or not?
2. Predict your response if the Frisbee were thrown to you. Explain your answer.

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